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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 000014

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [GH](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GOG](#)

SUBJECT: GHANA'S PARTY CONVENTIONS: RAWLINGS CANDIDATE WINS
IN NDC, KUFUOR'S FAVORITE LOSES IN NPP

REF: ACCRA 02517

Classified By: PolChief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.5 d and e.

11. (C) Summary: Ghana's two leading political parties held conventions which elected new party leadership and will help set the stage for national elections in 2008. The ruling NPP convention was marked by a tight leadership contest and left President Kufuor weakened within his party. The main opposition NDC convention was at times unruly and inflammatory, reinforcing the dominance within the party of former President Jerry Rawlings. Both parties changed many of their leaders, including new chairmen, who will be key players in selecting candidates and planning the 2008 electoral battles. End summary.

KUFUOR'S PICK LOSES NPP LEADERSHIP RACE

12. (SBU) On December 17, the NPP held its convention under the shadow of a corruption scandal. In the weeks prior to the convention, the media released the secretly taped complaint by former NPP Chairman Haruna Esseku that the President and his staff had been siphoning off party proceeds. The tape included an admission by NPP National Organizer Lord Comney (who was reelected) that he commanded 1,100 "action troopers" who worked for the party to disrupt and intimidate during elections (reftel). Under intense intra-party pressure because of this tape, Esseku resigned on the eve of the NPP convention. Two potential successors emerged: First Vice Chairman Steven Ntim (half-Brong, half-Ashanti) and Western Regional Chairman Peter Mac Manu (Ashanti). President Kufuor endorsed Ntim, who supporters said could have broadened the ethnic appeal of the Ashanti-dominated NPP and made an Ashanti presidential candidate more acceptable in 2008.

13. (C) In addressing the delegates, Kufuor referred to growing disenchantment with his administration as "Second Term Blues." In translating Kufuor's remarks into several local languages, the Master of Ceremonies offered the less than enthusiastic takeaway that the NPP was still the best option despite its recent shortcomings. Careful not to alienate whichever faction proved victorious, some delegates predicted a close race and kept their preferences private. However, Ntim's candidacy was hurt when Minister of Information Dan Botwe, a former NPP General Secretary, said he was not for "officialdom" and endorsed Mac Manu (later half-joking to Poloffs that the statement could lose him his job.) Esseku also endorsed Mac Manu. In what some media outlets called a "humbling" of Kufuor, Mac Manu took the party's top position with 711 votes to Ntim's 635.

RAWLINGS HOLDS SWAY OVER NDC

14. (SBU) The New Democratic Congress (NDC) convention in Koforidua on December 21 had more certain outcomes. Former President Rawlings' ongoing feuds with NDC Chairman Obed Asamoah and other party officials were no secret. (Note: Critics say Asamoah refused to release party funds in 2004 to support Atta-Mills and undermined party unity. End note.) Rawlings told delegates he would not condemn Asamoah and his operatives but would rather "pray for their souls." He said that corrupt NPP officials could expect lengthy jail terms if the NDC regains power. Rawlings' candidate for NDC chairman, Dr. Kwabena Adjei, won by a landslide (1,150 to 280).

17. (SBU) The convention was marked by allegations of intra-party violence and intimidation. Some news outlets reported that Asamoah's supporters had held delegates captive in Kumasi prior to the convention in an attempt to ensure votes for him. Frances Essiam, the party's former Women's Organizer, resigned from the party and told the media that Rawlings supporters had attacked her after she responded to Rawlings' convention remarks on JoyFM radio station. On December 29 Kwaku Baah, a former NDC Vice Chairman, also resigned from the NDC saying, "I cannot stand the thuggery and intimidation in the party."

COMMENT

18. (C) Ghana's party conventions convey important first signals about the tenor and landscape we are likely to see in the 2008 elections. The NPP convention reveals internal friction. Mac Manu's election may make it more difficult for Ashanti aspirants in 2008 (such as Kwame Addo Kufuor, the Defense Minister and the President's brother). Rawlings has in recent years been a lightning rod within his own party, with detractors hoping he would fade into the political background for the next presidential contest. This convention suggests that Rawlings is still the kingmaker for the NDC. His dominance and rough style will also continue to be a source of division and discontent for some in the NDC. In his speech to the convention, Atta-Mills reiterated his claims that the NPP stole the 2004 election and warned that if the NPP uses action troopers again, "They will live to regret it...There are times when you have to assert your rights." While his rhetoric was at least in part meant to bolster his popularity within the party (his NDC critics have claimed he is too mild-mannered and conciliatory), the ominous rhetoric emanating from the NDC and the reports of intra-party violence are not healthy for democracy in Ghana.

LANIER